



Society of St Vincent de Paul

11th March 2011

Dear Mr Finn,

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) welcomes the invitation to advance the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Pillar and wider C&V Sector. I would like to make two points in response to your letter dated 21st February 2011.

Firstly, the SVP is in agreement with the principles to underpin the structured dialogue set out in your letter. In addition to those outlined, we would welcome a clear acknowledgement of the value and importance of the social justice advocacy carried out by civil society organisations in a modern developed democracy. This is about more than bringing the experience of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to the table, and would fit well with an expanded version of point VI in your letter.

Secondly, I would like to draw your attention to the Advocacy Initiative, which the SVP currently chairs. The Advocacy Initiative was established:

- a) To advance knowledge on the current state of advocacy in Ireland;
- b) To provide a perspective on the Community and Voluntary sector's current challenges; and
- c) To contribute to informed debate with the sector and the State

The origins of the Initiative owed much to a growing view within the sector that government and senior civil servants were becoming increasingly hostile to advocacy. Yet this was a view that was not shared by all organisations, and a closer examination of this issue revealed a variety of experiences.

One of the key findings of the Advocacy Initiative was that the relationship between the Sector and the State could be improved. Further work on this will take place during 2011 – 2013 when the Initiative will carry out research on how policy makers perceive social justice advocacy; and research on perceived threats to the resources of an organisation engaging in advocacy work. For more information on the Advocacy Initiative please see www.advocacyinitiative.ie or feel free to contact me directly. The findings of the Advocacy Initiative and our planned work for 2011 may dovetail with your Department's interest in developing a structured dialogue process with organisations in the CV Pillar and wider Sector.

In conclusion, the SVP is happy to engage in this structured dialogue process and we would make ourselves available to attend the first meeting of the group.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Mark McCafferty', written in a cursive style.

John Mark McCafferty
Head of Social Justice and Policy
Society of St Vincent de Paul